

Honorable Justices
Representatives of the Nepal BAR Association
Members of the Media
Ladies and Gentlemen.
Namaste and Good Evening.

I am delighted to be here tonight as we highlight the completion of USAID's Strengthen Rule of Law program and celebrate its accomplishments.

The rule of law is the cornerstone for all other elements of democracy. A free and fair political system, protection of human rights, a vibrant civil society, public confidence in the judiciary system, and economic development all depend upon accountable governments, respect for human rights standards, and FAIR and ACCESSIBLE APPLICATION OF LAW. In post-conflict settings, like Nepal, reestablishing and strengthening the rule of law is crucial for the rebuilding process.

Over the past six years, the USAID-supported rule of law program has helped the judiciary build foundations for credible and efficient justice institutions and provided responsive and accessible dispute resolution services.

I would like to take a moment to highlight some of the key achievements of this program.

First, improving the administration of justice in the courts:
Effective justice requires that the judiciary possess the capacity to articulate and implement judicial decisions. It also demands that those decisions be reached through a fair and legitimate process.

The rule of law program took a holistic approach to improving administration of justice through technical assistance to institutions, including the Supreme Court, the Patan Appellate Court, and district courts.

The program introduced and implemented effective case tracking and management systems across many different courts in order to reduce delay and case congestion. The program also trained more than 500 justice-sector personnel and established an innovative appellate court internship program for talented law students.

Second, promoting alternative dispute resolution:
Nationwide, Nepal's courts have a backlog of more than 54,000 cases with 13,000 pending at the Supreme Court alone. On average, 50,000 new cases are registered annually. Many of these cases can and should be resolved through mediation.

By capitalizing on the gains made by USAID's previous rule of law program and the growing awareness about the value of mediation, we achieved major progress in improving, expanding, and institutionalizing sustainable mediation services and increasing awareness of those

services.

It is my hope that these mediation centers, set-up in different districts of Nepal, will continue to lower the numbers of back-logged cases and expedite the delivery of justice for the average Nepali citizen.

And third, increasing access to justice for society's most vulnerable groups:

The program provided vital legal services, such as free legal aid to women and disadvantaged communities. This had a direct, tangible impact on the lives of many Nepalese, who otherwise had little or no means to access justice.

The program also supported several public interest litigations, to more effectively push for government accountability. For example, one recent case included compensation related to loss of life and injuries from a medical professionals' negligence. Together, all these activities are helping improve access to justice, both at the national and the local level.

These successes and reforms would not have been possible without the efforts, commitment, and collaboration among all our partners – the Nepal Judiciary, the Nepal Bar Association, Civil Society, and The Asia Foundation. USAID is privileged to work with these organizations. I would like to thank you for your outstanding leadership and your contributions in improving access to justice in Nepal.

Although there have been accomplishments, the Nepali judiciary system remains a work in progress. As debates about restructuring the Nepali state continue, USAID remains firmly committed to promoting democracy, good governance, citizen's access to fair justice, and a broader respect for the rule of law.

It is my hope that with the collective vision of the leadership and organizations here today, the rule of law and access to justice will continue to grow for all of the people of Nepal.

Thank you.

Dr. Kevin A. Rushing
Mission Director, USAID/Nepal